

SAINT CATHERINE OF SIENA

receive them ; he is inviting them to peace, notwithstanding the injury he has received from them. They are misled if they think themselves the offended parties, for the sins of God's ministers should have been left to Him to punish. "I beseech you, Niccolo, by that ineffable love with which God has created and so sweetly ransomed you, to strive with all your power (for God has not given it to you save for some great hidden end) to bring about peace and union between your fellow-citizens and Holy Church, in order that yourselves and all Tuscany may not be imperilled."¹

And to the Pope she wrote, bidding him win back the revolted cities by love alone :—

" O my sweet, most holy babbo, I can see no other means for you to have back your little sheep, who like rebels have strayed from the fold of Holy Church. Wherefore I pray you in the name of Christ crucified, and I would have you do this mercy for me, conquer their malice with your benignity. We are yours, O father ; and I know that they all in general realize that they have done wrong; but, albeit they have no excuse for working evil, nevertheless, because of the hardships and cruel injustice that they suffered by reason of bad pastors and governors, it seemed to them impossible to act otherwise. For when they perceived the stench of the life of many of their rulers, who you know are demons incarnate, they came into such exceeding fear that they have acted like Pilate, who slew Christ in order not to lose lordship ; and so have they done, for they have persecuted you in order not to lose their state. I crave mercy, then, father, from you for them. Do not look at the ignorance and pride of your sons; but, with love and kindness, giving what gentle punishment and benign rebuke that will please your Holiness, render peace to us, wretched children who have offended. I tell you, sweet Christ on earth, in the name of Christ in heaven, that, if you act thus, without storm or strife, they will all come in sorrow for the offence committed and will lay their heads in your lap.

¹ Letter 171 (217). Cf. Marchionne Stefani, Lib. IX. rubr. 762. From 1344, the Florentine priors began their two months of office from the calends, instead of the 15th day as in Dante's time.